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SUBJECT: IRAN: BUNDESTAG MEMBERS DISCUSS LEVERAGING IRANIAN  
ELECTIONS, IRAN'S REGIONAL ROLE

REF: 07 BERLIN 254

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Jeffrey Rathke for reasons  
1.4(b)/(d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Two of the Bundestag's leading Iran experts discussed Iran-related issues with visiting NEA/IR Office Director Todd Schwartz November 11 and 12. In separate meetings, Rolf Muetzenich (SPD), a leading member of the Bundestag's Disarmament Subcommittee, and Iranian-German Green MP Omid Nouripour, discussed (1) the Bundestag and the German public's support for pressuring Iran, (2) the window of opportunity for sending signals to Iran between the U.S. and Iranian presidential elections, as well as (3) the need to engage Iran in particular on its relations with Afghanistan and the Gulf countries. Muetzenich, in his role as Chair of the German-Iranian Parliamentary Friendship Group, repeated his previous offer to facilitate informal dialogues between Congress and the Iranian Majles and noted the Parliamentary Friendship Group's planned January visit to Iran. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) BUNDESTAG, GERMAN POPULATION LARGELY SUPPORTIVE OF TOUGH LINE IF IRAN DOESN'T COOPERATE: Muetzenich underscored Germany's special relationship to Israel and its commitment to nonproliferation as major factors in German support for confronting Iran. Germany wants the international community to maintain sanctions, but sanctions require a common strategy, he said. While admitting that competing interests exist, particularly from German industry, Muetzenich believed that a majority of the Bundestag is for more sanctions if Iran does not cooperate with the international community, a position about which German industry is fully aware. According to Muetzenich, there is a common understanding among four of the five German political parties (excluding the Left Party) that joint diplomatic initiatives are necessary, as well as the need for solidarity with other countries when Iran threatens. This unity extends to their dislike of any form of military intervention in Iran, he added. While German companies and Germany's Iranian immigrant community have strong objections to additional sanctions, Muetzenich believes the German public would support it; he dismissed oft-cited concerns about job losses as more a political than a genuine economic issue.

13. (C) NEED FOR CAREFULLY CALIBRATED MESSAGES DURING TRANSITION AND BEYOND: Both MPs agreed that the time frame between the U.S. and Iranian presidential elections provides an opportunity to send effective signals to the Iranian leadership and population about the international community's intentions. Iranians are interested in direct talks with the U.S., said Muetzenich: "Germany's not so important." The U.S. is in a special position, he said, given the U.S.'s soft power advantage in Iran; he joked that U.S. culture has more influence over Iranian youth than German youth. Nouripour noted that expectations in Iran have greatly increased due to the Obama election victory; expectations would double, he predicted, if ex-President Mohammed Khatami also wins the June 2009 Iranian election. Should Khatami win, a dynamic

period of a few weeks would exist in which a window of opportunity would be opened: "how do we prevent it from being shut?" posited Nouripour.

¶4. (C) Muetzenich called for a transatlantic approach to Iran that demonstrates international unity and a willingness to reach a solution, while at the same time not revealing differences to the Iranians. Muetzenich emphasized that during the upcoming period of U.S. transition and in the run-up to the Iranian presidential election, the international community needs to carefully craft both its public and private messages, in particular to the Supreme Leader. Showing Iran that the opportunity exists for progress and decreased isolation is particularly important, he said.

¶5. (C) Muetzenich, revealing his party's strong commitment to disarmament, noted that if the incoming U.S. administration returns the agenda to disarmament, this would help the German internal discussion on Iran. He also called for the USG to more clearly formulate its policies towards external opposition groups, including, "but not limited to", the MEK. (COMMENT: Muetzenich was likely alluding to the PKK-affiliated PJAK, whose leadership has repeatedly claimed in the German media that they receive USG material support. END COMMENT)

¶6. (C) IRAN'S ROLE IN REGION SHOULD BE ADDRESSED: Both Muetzenich and Nouripour agreed with Schwartz's assertion that Iran's regional role must also be addressed. Muetzenich said a common strategy on Afghanistan must be developed; he advocated for sending messages that could develop a common

BERLIN 00001675 002 OF 002

understanding of what interests we share. Nouripour pushed even harder on Afghanistan, asking why the U.S. would not acknowledge Iran's role in Afghanistan: "it is impossible to overestimate the Iranian role in Afghanistan," he asserted, citing Iranian support for infrastructure and school construction.

¶7. (C) Both Muetzenich and Nouripour also cited the need for increased discussion of Iran's relationship with its Gulf neighbors. Nouripour related a comment by a former IRGC commander that, if Iran were to be attacked, Iran would respond not in Iraq or Afghanistan, but in other neighboring countries. Calling Gulf countries even more important in the Iran discussion than Germany, Muetzenich said that the creation of a regional security body, or even a Gulf-wide Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, could serve as possible models for such dialogue. Similarly, Nouripour noted that Bahraini interlocutors say they are less concerned about Iran developing a nuclear weapon and more concerned about Iran's ability to safely manage the Bushehr nuclear power plant.

¶8. (C) When asked by Schwartz to name possible areas for increased international cooperation with Iran, Muetzenich pointed to counternarcotics policy, border security, and environmental issues, including nuclear waste storage. Nouripour also noted a growing Iranian interest in renewable energy.

¶9. (C) WILLINGNESS TO ASSIST IN INFORMAL PARLIAMENTARY EXCHANGE: Muetzenich noted that the Bundestag's German-Iranian Friendship Group will visit Iran January 10-14 as part of their regular exchange. Repeating a previous offer (reftel), he expressed his willingness, as the Group's chair, to facilitate an informal, private discussion between members of the new U.S. Congress and the Iranian Majles following Iranian elections or even earlier.

¶10. (U) This message was cleared by Mr. Schwartz.

Koenig